

REPORT ON  
**THE DEDICATION OF THE BARDEJOV, SLOVAKIA HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL**

JUNE 24, 2014

By Emil Fish

As many of you know, in 2005, I traveled with my family to Bardejov, Slovakia, the town where I grew up before being imprisoned in the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. I was appalled that the cemetery was so overgrown with weeds that some of the headstones were not visible and the synagogue and other religious buildings were in terrible disrepair and housed a business.

When I returned to Los Angeles, I formed the Bardejov Jewish Preservation Committee (BJPC). The Committee has done much since its formation: The cemetery was cleared of debris, the falling headstones were repaired and restored, and BJPC charted a grave-marker database that is accessible on the Website: [bardejov.org](http://bardejov.org).

With regard to the Old Synagogue, the Beith Hamidrash (school), and the Mikvah (ritual bath), these buildings known as the Jewish Suburbia housed a plumbing supply company. The Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic (UZZNO) was able to have the plumbing company vacate the Old Synagogue and, through a grant, restore it. Much of the original ceiling is visible ... and quite beautiful. The other two buildings are still occupied by the plumbing supply company.

Most recently, the BJPC built a memorial to commemorate the 3,262 Jews from Bardejov and nearby who were killed during the Holocaust. The dedication took place in Bardejov on June 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, after a welcoming dinner, there was a presentation in the Old Synagogue by Pavel and Peter Hudak, father and son local researchers of Jewish history in Bardejov. The exhibit had memorabilia that they found in attics, basements, and archives. There was also a visual presentation of life in Bardejov before and during the Holocaust.

On the 24<sup>th</sup>, attendees assembled at the Bardejov Memorial, a plaza surrounded by a fence with decorative Star of David motifs. The Bardejov Memorial comprises:

- A MEMORIAL WALL, 14 black granite tablets inscribed with the names of the 3,262 Bardejov area Jews who were killed during the Holocaust. A perpetual light is mounted on the wall.
- Five History Tablets describing Jewish history in the town, the Holocaust, the Righteous of Bardejov, rabbinic leadership, and a list of major donors to the memorial. The Righteous of Bardejov are seven individuals recognized for their self-sacrifice and bravery in providing assistance for the survival and protection of Jews and Jewish places during the Holocaust.
- A Memorial Garden, which provides an area for quiet reflection.

- A Star of David monument, a beautiful and powerful symbol of steel and granite mounted on railroad tracks.

The dedication of the memorial included four Keynote Speakers; music by Josef Patkan, a gypsy whose grandfather was a prisoner in the Dachau Concentration Camp; and a choir of children from the local public school singing “Every Person Has A Name”, a famous poem by Zelda Schneersohn Mishkovsky. As they sang, flashed on a large screen were images of the Bardejovers who perished in the Holocaust. There were many murmurs and tears as people in the audience recognized loved ones.

In addition to me, the other speakers were: Chairwoman Weiss, U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission in Slovakia N. Thatcher Scharpf, and Boris Hanuscak, the Mayor of Bardejov.

I spoke in both English and Slovak of the need for education on the Holocaust at all school levels. As time passes, less and less is remembered and we need to keep memory of the Holocaust alive so that such atrocities are never repeated.

Chairwoman Weiss gave a powerful speech and dignified by her presence the importance of the Memorial Dedication and the restoration and preservation of our past.

Mayor Hanuscak acknowledged the atrocities of the Holocaust and declared that such inhumanity must not happen again. Prior to the dedication, the Mayor, on behalf of the Town of Bardejov, accepted the responsibility for the maintenance of the Memorial.

That evening, at the closing dinner, the Memorial Book of Jewish Bardejov was presented for the first time. It includes stories and pictures from Jews from Bardejov.